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The Modern Indictment of Catholicism—1

Is the Church Intolerant?

By
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Associate Editor, "America"

The Other Pamphlets in this Series are:

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THE AMERICA PRESS, 461 8th Avenue, New York, N. Y.

Imprimi potest:

EDWARD C. PHILLIPS, S.J.,
Provincial Maryland-New York.

Nihil obstat:

ARTHUR J. SCANLAN, S.T.D.,
Censor Librorum.

Imprimatur:

✠PATRICK CARDINAL HAYES,
Archbishop of New York.

May 4, 1929.

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Is the Church Intolerant?

POSSIBLY nothing is more timely or more important for Catholics than that they should have brought home to them the fact that their religion is very much on trial today before their fellowmen and that they have an obligation to fit themselves to meet the issue.

God, we know, cannot fail, and His religion will not fail. Disaster, however, may befall one's individual faith and even the organized Church in a given country. Should this occur it will not be because Catholicism is not in the right but because Catholics are either ignorant of the truths of their Faith or indifferent to its glorious traditions, or lack the character to live up to its exactions.

Unquestionably there are such people in the United States: Catholics who cannot give a rational exposition of their belief to an inquiring non-Catholic yet who can discuss in detail contemporary crimes and scandals and the latest sporting, political and social events which clutter our tabloids; Catholics, who have little or no realization of what their Church stands for in the world or of what she has accomplished and its still doing for culture and civilization and morality; Catholics, above all, who lacking this knowledge and appreciation, fail to exemplify the ideals of the religion they profess in their daily conduct. They neglect to live by God's law because most everybody else is living loosely, to live honestly because dishonesty seems the surest road to success, to live morally because immorality is well nigh deified, to live kindly because selfishness dominates mankind, to live restrainedly because dissipation is the vogue, to live chastely because the sacredness of matrimony is assailed by advocates of license and profligacy, whose concept of life is purely materialistic.

It is to meet these conditions especially, and in the hope of instructing and strengthening our Catholics in their Faith and of informing interested non-Catholics about it, that this pamphlet has been arranged as the first of a series of five

under the general title, "The Modern Indictment of Catholicism."¹

CATHOLICISM ON TRIAL

The fact that Catholicism should be on trial today is not new. From the beginning it has been misrepresented, misunderstood, calumniated, persecuted. The Church was on trial when a Nero, a Diocletian, a Domitian, hounded and imprisoned and racked and made funeral pyres of the first Christian converts. It was on trial when from the fifth to the ninth centuries the barbarian hordes swooped down from their northern fastnesses over Christian Europe. It was on trial at a later period when Moorish and Arabian paganism threatened to overrun the Continent and set back a thousand years the clock of Christian civilization. It was on trial when during the so-called Reformation whole nations apostatized from the Faith. But always in the end its enemies were confounded and its Divinity more fully vindicated. With its doctrines uncorrupted, its organization undisturbed, its honor unspotted, it continued to stand forth as the great civilizer, the great moral teacher, the great peacemaker, the great bulwark of human liberty against oppression, the great patron of the arts and sciences, and the great upholder of truth and goodness against vice and falsehood.

Yet despite all these victories and vindications, the Catholic Church still stands at the bar of public opinion, and perhaps no place today is she forced to defend her honor more insistently and more publicly than in our United States. True, even here she has been on trial before. A few hundred years ago the beautiful Mohawk Valley was watered with the blood of the martyred Jogues and his intrepid companions. But then the persecutors of the Church were unlettered savages, suspicious of the white-man's color almost as much as of his religion, and hence easily excusable.

Today, however, we boast our civilization and education,

¹The others are: II. Is the Church Arrogant? III. Is the Church Un-American? IV. Is the Church Officious? V. Is the Church a National Asset?

and Catholics are no longer burned or tomahawked in America. Yet the test of their faith is no less keen. Indeed, in some respects it is more dangerous, more stinging, and more effective, because more subtle, and because ridicule and cynicism have taken the place of the pincers and the stake.

Catholics often find themselves discriminated against in commercial, social and political life, merely because of their religion, and it is assumed in some quarters that they are necessarily less honest citizens and less trustworthy employes, and this notwithstanding the history of their Church in every one of our States from Maine to California and from the Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico is an open book where those who honestly wish may read its glorious achievements for God and country.

THE ARRAIGNMENT

It were a useless task to enumerate all the charges on which Catholicism is at present arraigned before the country. One scurrilous sheet charges the Church with being morally corrupt, and even in the halls of Congress a United States Senator assails her as a great political machine. On the public platform she is sneered at and calumniated. Secular weekly and monthly magazines quite regularly have some fault to find with her.

We are told that dear old Mother Church is out-of-date. Her teachings are criticized and misrepresented, her every action misinterpreted. The Hierarchy she maintains, her Religious Orders, the claims of the Papacy to civil independence, the celibacy of her clergy, her educational policy, her moral standards, her attitude towards marriage, divorce and birth control—all share in the attack. Uninformed and hostile critics freely fling mud at her fair form, and she and all her works and pomps are denounced as vigorously as the Christian at Baptism renounces the devil and all his works and pomps. To many people who call themselves intelligent and educated, the Catholic Church is still the scarlet woman, a menace to civil and social order, and to morality and democracy.

True, Catholics are under no obligation to defend them-

selves against these calumnies. The burden of proof is on those who make the charges, for it is an axiom of American jurisprudence that every man is innocent until he is proven guilty. Because, however, so many sincere non-Catholics are being deceived, a presentation of the Church's position seems imperative. Moreover, the defense of the Church will aid to the fuller enlightenment of Catholics that they may more thoroughly grasp how frivolous the indictment is; to their information, that, queried about these charges by non-Catholic acquaintances, they may be able to answer them correctly; to their encouragement, that, having constantly to defend their Faith, they may not be disheartened; and to their inspiration, that they may the better appreciate their religion and love it and be urged more practically to live up to it.

CATHOLIC INTOLERANCE

At the head of the charges made against Catholicism, perhaps none is more vehemently insisted on than that the Church is intolerant. Catholics, we are told, are allowed no liberty of judgment about their dogmas; they must accept unquestioningly what the Church tells them; they may not participate in non-Catholic religious services, though non-Catholics may be invited to come to their churches; they may not read every book; they are prohibited from intermarrying with non-Catholics and from sending their children to any but Catholic schools; they may not endorse current economic and social theories that advocate a modification of long-accepted principles about the stability of marriage and justify such practices as companionate marriage, divorce and birth control. These are but a few random instances commonly brought forth to substantiate the charge of intolerance. Now, what have we to say to them all?

We can grant that the assertions are substantially true. Individually we are not at liberty to question the truths Jesus Christ, through the Catholic Church, proposes to our belief: we may not discuss Divine Revelation as we would the tariff or farm relief or a merchant marine. We may not,

with a good conscience, go to a Catholic Church one Sunday, an Episcopalian another, a Presbyterian a third, a Methodist a fourth, and so on, as if Our Lord had not definitely and unmistakably established but one true Church. Since Christian faith and morals are vitally concerned, we are not free about intermarrying with those of other religions, or reading questionable books, or sending our children to schools where religion is taboo or heresy or atheism taught, and much less can we subscribe to the popular moral code that will let us follow any whim or passion and measure right and wrong by our convenience or our pocketbook, as if there were no immutable moral standards set by nature and the God of nature.

THE NATURE OF TOLERANCE

But do all these things and a hundred more like them prove that we are intolerant? Not in any unworthy sense. The fallacy lies in the assumption that tolerance is always a virtue and intolerance always something vicious. There are very many things that reasonable people may not be tolerant of, not only in religion, but in every phase of their lives, private and public, social and political. Can the State be tolerant when there is question of treason or anarchy? Can society, with impunity, be tolerant of the criminal class or the violently insane and let them run amuck to imperil the property and lives of the citizens? Would a mother be blamed for intolerance if she closed her home to one of her children's playmates who happened to have the measles or diphtheria? Would a father be justly charged with intolerance because he prohibited certain papers or magazines to enter the house, if he deemed them dangerous to the morals of his growing boys and girls, or if he was insistent that his sons and daughters should not associate with some sexual pervert?

Tolerance does not mean that we must put up with anything and everything, that we must compromise with everybody, that we must throw principles to the wind to gratify our fellow-citizens and to avoid displeasing people. Properly understood, tolerance, which of its very nature has to

do with evils, means that what we cannot cure we endure. It does not mean that we deliberately close our eyes to an evil, that we do not denounce it, do not attempt to escape it, do not try our best to get rid of it. I patiently tolerate a pain when I have done all that I can to alleviate it. I tolerate a neighborhood nuisance only when there is no way of remedying it. It were irrational to act otherwise.

POSITION OF THE CHURCH

Now apply these principles to religion and you will see that the Catholic Church cannot be tolerant of other religions, of other principles than Christ's. People need not accept her dogmas or doctrines, but they have no right to expect that she is going to conform herself to their ideas and fancies or to condemn her because she does not suit herself to their religious and moral notions.

The Catholic Church believes firmly, and every honest Catholic believes with her, and with good reason, too, that she alone is the true Church, that she alone is the custodian of the Divine deposit of Faith, that the doctrines she teaches are an inheritance she has received from her Divine Founder, the God-Man, infallible Truth, who can neither deceive nor be deceived. She is honestly convinced that she has a commission not to manufacture dogmas, but to propagate what Christ taught. His command was that His Apostles were to go forth and teach not what they wanted or liked, but "all things whatsoever I have taught you."

Now, if this be so, if this be her position, then logically and consistently she must uphold the truths she teaches at any expense; she cannot gloss them over; she cannot be silent about them; she cannot admit that Judaism or Protestantism may be right when she knows they are not; she cannot teach that one Church is as good as another or that it does not matter what one believes, when she knows these propositions are false; she cannot leave the world under the impression by her conduct or her silence that divorce may be condoned, that education without religion may be winked at, that business and professional men may have one standard of morals for Sunday and another the rest of the week,

one standard in their private lives and another in their public careers, or that crimes that the law of God abominates, adultery, fornication, lying, dishonesty, perjury, birth control, avarice, or injustice, may sometimes be justified when their avoidance entails economic or physical hardships.

DOGMATIC TOLERANCE ILLOGICAL

Dogmatic tolerance in a true religion is a contradiction. How can any self-respecting religion that professes to be a teacher of Divine and immutable truth say to a thinking man, "It makes little difference what you believe or how you worship or what code of morals you follow; you can be a Fundamentalist or a Modernist, as you like; you can accept or reject Holy Writ as you like; you can observe the first half of the Decalogue and discard the rest; you can take some of Christ's teachings and disregard the others; you can accept the doctrine of heaven and deny that of hell, you can acknowledge the Pope of Rome as the Vicar of Christ or you can deny his authority?"

A Church which holds itself out as the infallible custodian of revealed truth can no more compound with error without automatically destroying its own entity, than a political faction which stands for definite principles can subscribe to the contradictory principles upheld by its opponents. Black and white, truth and falsehood, virtue and vice cannot be reconciled; neither can Catholicism and Protestantism in any of its forms; neither can Catholic principles and the philosophy of free-thinkers, materialists, indifferentists, or atheists. The Catholic Church is and must be intolerant regarding principles of faith and morals but, far from this being to her discredit, it is one of her great glories and a proof of her Divinity.

The Profession of Faith which converts make shows in unmistakable language, however harsh it may sound, just what the position of the Church is in this matter. In part, the formula reads:

I, having before me the holy Gospels, which I touch with my hand and knowing that no one can be saved without that faith which the Holy, Catholic, Apostolic Roman Church holds, believes and teaches,

against which I grieve that I have greatly erred, in as much as I have held and believed doctrines opposed to her teaching—

I now, with sorrow and contrition for my past errors profess that I believe the Holy, Catholic, Apostolic Roman Church to be the only and true Church established on earth by Jesus Christ, to which I submit myself with my whole soul. . . .

With a sincere heart, therefore, and with unfeigned faith, I *detest* and abjure every error, heresy and *sect* opposed to the said Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Roman Church. So help me God and these His holy Gospels. . . . [*Italics inserted.*]

This last declaration is the logical practical reaction to the assertions that precede it. Any other attitude would be the height of inconsistency.

PRACTICAL TOLERATION

But while the Church, like her Divine Founder; is adamant in these matters, she is most tolerant in dealing with those not of the Fold. She is not intolerant of Protestants, but of Protestantism; she is not intolerant of Jews but of Judaism. For the individuals, for they have souls to save, the Church has all the love and affection of Jesus Christ Himself who died for them. She is as interested, too, in their material as in their spiritual welfare. But that does not mean that she must leave them under the false impression that their religion is Christ's when she is convinced that it is not, and never will be.

Christ thundered forth against sin, yet He was most gentle in dealing with sinners as the stories of the dying thief, of Magdalen, and of the woman taken in adultery show. Because He might give offense to Jews or Romans, because He might be misunderstood, because the "Liberals" of His day would have wished Him to be conciliatory, He did not swerve one iota from the truth or from doing His duty and teaching His doctrines, hard as many of them were for His hearers. And so His Church has ever acted, though it has sometimes cost her dearly, and though time and again certain even of her children looked askance at her for her conduct.

Catholics, then, are not intolerant of their fellowmen, of non-Catholics. It is in no sense Catholic practice, let alone

Catholic principle, to discriminate against any man or woman because of his or her belief, to refuse them employment on that account, to deny them a vote, to hesitate to mingle socially or fraternally with them, to exclude them from their educational advantages and the like. In businesses under Catholic management you will regularly find plenty of non-Catholic employes; in Catholic households you will frequently find non-Catholic help; in what are often spoken of as "strong Catholic" political districts you will not uncommonly find that non-Catholic candidates for office are elected over Catholic opponents; in our Catholic schools in the country you will find any number of non-Catholic students. Our churches are always open to non-Catholics. Our retreat-houses frequently have as their week-end guests non-Catholics. Our charitable organizations, hospitals, orphanages and the like, all assist them in their needs. In fact, it is expressly provided in Canon Law that Catholic Bishop and pastors should consider even non-Catholics in their territory as in some way especially entrusted to their care by God.

But while tolerant in charitable and similar fields, Catholics are and must be, as we said, intolerant of religious error. Protestants who accept the fundamental dogma that each man may interpret Scripture for himself, and the principle that there is no Divinely constituted infallible spokesman in religious matters, need not, in fact should not, assume an attitude of intolerance of Catholicism, but Catholics must anathematize their heresies and errors.

PROTESTANT POSITION

Some years ago, discussing this subject in the *Month*, the Rev. Joseph Keating, S.J., contrasted the positions of Catholicism and Protestantism in the following passage:

We must admit, then, that the conscious possessor of religious truth must be intolerant of religious error, otherwise he would deny his own faith and equate certitude to mere opinion.

But, we may be asked, is that any reason why such a man should make his own convictions the standard of orthodoxy and compel or persuade, if he can, his neighbor to share them? And if not, what excuse can be offered for that arch-persecutor and prose-

lytizer, the Catholic Church? Here it becomes important to define more closely what persecution and proselytism mean. Is all application of physical force or material penalties with a view of causing or preventing or punishing change of religious belief necessarily to be called persecution? And is the word *proselytism* applicable to every endeavor to induce others to change their faith for ours? Neither of these questions can be answered in the affirmative unless we are prepared to say that God never delegates His rights over conscience to men—an idea which the whole conception of the Catholic Church denies.

It is on this point of primary importance that the Protestant view differs from ours. By their position they are compelled to look upon the Church as a human institution with no Divine commission to instruct and guide the world in religious matters and no Divine guarantee against failure in her office. . . . We maintain that there is evidence to show conclusively that Christ established an infallible Church to endure till the end of time, to perpetuate the work of the Incarnation, to instruct and direct the consciences of men in matters of faith and morals, to judge, remit and exact penalties for sins committed, and to proclaim His message to all the nations of the earth.

Here, then, are two opposite convictions, both professedly based on historical investigation, and, therefore, on Protestant principles, both, if sincerely held, equally worthy of respect. How, then, do Protestants justify their assumption that their view is necessarily correct and ours necessarily wrong? It is a case of reason arrayed against reason, and there is no arbiter on earth to decide. Surely, toleration is the only rational attitude for them to adopt, unless they wish themselves to claim the prerogatives they deny to Catholicity.

It is otherwise with the Church. It must be otherwise with an institution which claims to be the abode of the unerring Spirit of God. According to her Founder's command, she must teach His doctrine always and everywhere—woe to her if she preach not the Gospel; she must teach as He taught "with authority"; she must condemn as He did all who consciously owe and refuse her obedience. . . .

We have seen that if tolerance means the refusal to give religious error the same consideration as truth, Catholics must be intolerant in their thoughts. On his own principles the Protestant can only say of his religious beliefs: "I hold this for certain. My reason tells me you are wrong in holding the opposite. But, after all, you *may* be right, for subjective impressions are not infallible." But the Catholic states his position thus: "I am certain of this on the strength of God's word. In holding the opposite you cannot possibly be right." So much for mental attitude.

CATHOLICISM AND PROTESTANTISM CONTRASTED

Obviously in this matter of tolerance the attitude of the Church is decidedly at variance with the position of non-Catholic bodies. The latter, for the most part, make pro-

fession of being absolutely tolerant, dogmatically and personally. Their principles that one religion is as good as another; that all the so-called Christian denominations are doing Christ's work; that the Golden Rule is the great norm of human conduct; and that the all-embracing slogan of the fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man supplies a basis for a common religious understanding, would naturally lead to the inference that Catholics should be unhampered in the profession and practice of their faith.

In the history of the country the Protestant Know-Nothing, A. P. A., and Kluxer movements have all given the lie to this non-Catholic profession of faith and boasted code of toleration. Today we have respected citizens, presumably one-hundred-per-cent Americans, of the type of Mr. Charles C. Marshall and Senator Thomas Heflin openly charging that Catholicism is a danger to the Republic and using their talents and their influence to rouse the country against what they consider the Catholic menace. There are individuals and corporations in the United States at present that live and wax rich on the anti-Catholic propaganda they broadcast on the platform, in the press and over the air. Book-publishing establishments which because of the professed religious and political creeds of their executives should be altogether tolerant of the Church, lend themselves without scruple to the printing and circulation of volumes whose only purpose is to stir up anti-Catholic hate and animosity. It would seem that members of any religious group, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, Mormons and Quakers, may all lead their religious life without let or hindrance, without criticism or discrimination, but let there be question of a Catholic and he is *prima facie* suspect as dangerous to the Republic.

On the other hand, Catholicism frankly states its position regarding toleration to the world and in practice abides by its protestations. It proclaims that dogmatically it is not and cannot be tolerant; one religion is not as good as another; there can be no compromises in principles that touch faith and morals. At the same time it most emphatically proclaims that other men are to be permitted to follow out their conscientious beliefs untrammelled, accountable not

to man but to God for the faith that is in them, and that they may not be discriminated against precisely because of their religion. In consequence, as occasion arises for the exercise of works of mercy and charity, corporal or spiritual, by Catholics towards those not of their Faith, they are not wanting. I dare say that no Catholic hospital and no Catholic relief home ever turned away a man or woman in distress just because they were not of the Faith. Without doubt were Franklin Ford or Thomas Heflin to be in need of food, lodging or medical care, though God forbid that they should be, there isn't a Catholic institution in the country that wouldn't welcome the opportunity to serve them with the same zeal and charity that the most devoted Catholic might have reason to expect.

On principle, then, the Church must discourage her children from marrying outside the Fold because of the risk to their faith and the danger for any children that may be born. On principle, the Church must prohibit attendance at and participation in false and heretical religious services. On principle, the Church cannot countenance education for her children without God and divorced from religion. On principle, the Church cannot be indifferent to what the Faithful read for the cultivation of their minds, or to their moral standards. On principle, Christ's Church cannot shift its Creed or its moral principles with every changing wind. What is false she cannot call true any more than she can call the day, night, or the sun, the moon. When she staunchly and intolerantly, if one insists on using the deceptive word, combats falsehood and champions truth, when she staunchly and intolerantly decries neo-paganism and extols virtue, she but follows the commands and examples of Christ. And if men are honest and unprejudiced, they must acknowledge that she is doing the right thing. At all events, on that account, Catholics have nothing to blush for or apologize for. There is only one thing that must ever shame them regarding their religion, and that is that they personally fail to measure up to its ideals and live as it demands them to.



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